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ABSTRACT

Dr. Joshua Fishman, a world renowned sociolinguist and expert on endangered languages, postulates a continuum of eight stages of language loss for indigenous languages. The most-endangered languages are in stage 8 and only have a few elderly speakers. In stage 7 only adults beyond child-bearing age still speak the tribal language. In stage 6 there is still some intergenerational use of languages in homes. In stage 5 the language is alive and used in minority communities, and even on a voluntary basis in schools. In stage 4 the minority language is required in elementary schools as a language of instruction, not as a second language to be learned. In stage 3 the indigenous language is used among employees, but not by supervisors. In stage 2 lower government services and mass media use the language. In stage 1 higher levels of government and higher education use the language. The most important factor in keeping endangered languages alive is their intergenerational transmission at home. Outside of homes, minority-language use in early childhood centers and in pre- and post-natal programs for young mothers is important. Communities can support their languages by using them in businesses, markets, community centers, and local agencies and services. Minority languages can be given an exclusive role in traditional family and community social activities. The role of schools is to build on native language fluency that children learn at home. (Contains 21 references.) (TD)

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Maintaining and Developing Indigenous Languages

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Maintaining and Developing Indigenous Languages

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According to Michael Krauss, director of the Alaska Native Language Center, only 20 of the 175 American Indian languages still spoken in the United States are still be learned by children (Krauss, 1996). Joshua Fishman in his 1991 book *Reversing Language Shift* emphasizes that this learning by children, the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages in the home, is the most important factor in keeping these languages alive. Thus it is plain to see that drastic measures need to be taken if we are not to see a vast number of indigenous languages become extinct within a generation or two.

In recent years government policy towards indigenous languages has changed. After more than a century of fairly consistent effort to destroy American Indian languages in the United States, including the removal of Indian children to boarding schools where they were punished for speaking their native language, this assimilationist policy was explicitly reversed in 1990 with the passage of the Native American Languages Act (P.L. 101-477). This Act made it United States Government policy to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages" (as quoted in Cantoni, 1996, p. 70).

To help implement the spirit of the Native American Languages Act, the United States Department of Education's Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs sponsored symposiums in 1994 and 1995 at Northern Arizona University to bring together "tribal educators and experts on linguistics, language renewal, and language teaching to lay out a blueprint of policy changes, educational reforms, and community initiative to stabilize and revitalize American Indian and Alaska Native languages" (Cantoni,

1996, p. vi). The proceedings of these two symposiums were edited by their organizer, Dr. Gina Cantoni, and published by Northern Arizona University in 1996 as a 256 page monograph titled *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*.

This paper summarizes the results of those two symposiums and extends that work in regard to what needs to be done to make the rhetoric of the Native American Languages Act a reality.[1] The symposium sessions highlighted a number of barriers, misconceptions, conclusions, and recommendations. Barriers included the lack of community places for the exclusive use of the native languages, the failure of parents to use these languages with their young children, and poor language teaching methods in schools. Misconceptions included myths such as that learning a native language detracts from learning English, schools can save languages, and that writing a language can keep it alive.

Symposium participants largely agreed that the role of schools is to build on native language fluency that children learn at home. The working groups at the symposium recommended that children learn their native language at home at an early age, that the native language be used in preschools, elementary schools, secondary schools, and universities, and that culture should be taught along with language (Cantoni, 1996). Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 summarize the recommendations of the November 1994 symposium working groups. Many of the ideas and conclusions expressed at the symposiums were related to the world-wide study of endangered languages done by Dr. Joshua Fishman.

[Insert Tables 1-4 about here]

Fishman, a world renowned sociolinguist and expert on endangered languages, keynoted both symposiums. Fishman's extensive writings and his speeches at the symposiums emphasize the limited role that schools can play in language restoration and the importance of organizing effective community support for their indigenous language. Other speakers and participants at the symposiums echoed Dr. Fishman's thoughts.

Based on his study of minority languages worldwide, Fishman (1991) postulates a continuum of eight stages of language loss with stage eight being the closest to total extinction and stage one being the closest to dynamic survival. Below, Fishman's eight stages are summarized along with suggestions on what can be done to promote indigenous language use at each stage.

Fishman's Eight Stages of Language Loss

The most seriously endangered languages are in **stage eight** and only have a few isolated elderly speakers. Partly as a result of years of concerted language suppression by the United States government, many American Indian tribes, such as the Salish and Kootnai in Montana and almost all the many Indian languages of California, are in Fishman's eighth stage.

Stage eight languages are on the verge of extinction. Speakers need to be recorded using media that is not subject to degradation over time, such as VHS videotapes are, and through written transcripts using phonetic alphabets that catch the nuances of the language's sound system. However, this archiving of language knowledge can be tantamount to an admission of defeat, with the language becoming a museum piece. While, stage eight elders seldom have the stamina to teach young children, especially in large groups, they can teach young adults singly or in small groups. The Native Californian Language Network through the "Language Apprentice" approach is actually passing on the language to young adults who have both the stamina to teach young children and who can be trained in teaching methods appropriate for schools.

Leanne Hinton (1991, 1994) has written extensively about the Language Apprentice methods both in columns in *News From Native California* and her book *Flutes of Fire: Essays on California Indian Languages*. As well as describing methods, she discusses in her columns and books the beauty of indigenous languages. Her recommendations to teachers and learners of Indian languages shown in Table 5 are especially useful.

for them and needs to be a part of their identity. Similarly, for language revival efforts to be successful, children need to feel that it is "their" indigenous language and that speaking the language makes them a member of an important and worthwhile group. As with any "club" there needs to be interesting and important projects and activities that the children do as part of this language club.

Historically, school-based second language teaching has not led to "communicative competency" (the ability to carry on a sustained conversation) in the new language for most students. It is extremely important to use language teaching methods in school that will prepare and encourage students to use the language they are learning outside of school. Reyhner and Tennant (1996) give a brief review of language teaching methods and suggest an approach that draws on the work of Krashen (Krashen & Terrell (1983), Lozanov (1978), and Berlitz. They summarize this work in five principles that need to be addressed, with varying degrees of emphasis, in any language-teaching program:

1. Putting primary emphasis on *communication*, not grammar

2. Using *context* that is real or at least realistic

3. Processing *content* of high interest to the learner

4. Adjusting the pace of instruction to the students' progress

    -moving from simple to complex (generally speaking)

    -emphasizing speaking over speaking correctly

    -putting comprehension before completion

5. Correcting students through modeling (pp. 294-295).

A good model for promoting Native American language preservation and teaching that incorporates the above principles is described in appendix of *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (Cantoni, 1996, pp. 234-239). Developed by Dick Littlebear and the staff of the

[Insert table 5 about here]

Other tribes throughout the World are in **stage seven** where only adults beyond child bearing age still speak the tribal language. While often lacking training in teaching methods appropriate for large groups of older children, these older adults can teach their grandchildren their language as demonstrated in the highly successful "language nests" of New Zealand (Fleres, 1989) and Hawai'i (Kamana & Wilson, 1996; Wilson, 1991). There elders can care for young children in preschool settings and immerse them in their language. Elders can also team up with certified teachers who can help control students in the classroom and suggest second language teaching methods while they learn the language along with the children. In Hawai'i parents are also asked to learn the Hawaiian language along with their children who are immersed in it at school. Summer camps and retreats can also be held where participants voluntarily pledge to use only their indigenous language, such as those described by Nicholson (1990) held at Maori cultural centers in New Zealand. These retreats focus on bringing both Maori language and culture alive.

In **stage six** there is still some intergenerational use of languages in the homes. Here parents need to be encouraged to use the language and make places in the community where children can use the language. These places can be community centers, schools, churches, and so forth. It is important to give the language prestige so that the children learning the language will keep speaking it through their teenage years until they become parents and can pass it on to their children. Creating a published written literature of poems, plays, and stories is one way to give a language prestige. Also having government officials, athletes, and other well known community members use the language is helpful.

In **stage five** the language is still very alive and used in minority communities, and even on a voluntary basis in schools. Frank Smith (1988) in his book *Joining the Literacy Club* focuses on the importance of getting children to see that literacy is something

Interface Alaska Bilingual Multifunctional Resource Center, the model stress the importance of teacher training and the use of the Total Physical Response (TPR) and the "Natural" Approaches to language learning. The model also discusses the importance of attitudes towards language, building a theoretical base, building a rationale for language preservation, classroom teaching methods, practical applications, and follow-up to training.

According to Fishman (1991), stages 8 to 5 are the minimal prerequisites for keeping native languages alive and do not require the dominant English-speaking group's cooperation. Stages four through one deal with giving the minority language a legal status, including minority language use in schools, the workplace, and in government. This has been accomplished in principle through the rhetoric of the Native American Languages Act and by policy statements passed by some tribes (Reyhner, 1996). However, making the rhetoric reality is another issue, and efforts for real change can bring right wing political reactions such as those described by Jim Crawford (1992) in *Hold Your Tongue: Bilingualism and the Politics of "English only"*.

In **stage four**, the minority language is required in elementary schools (here it is important to have it as a language of instruction for "academic" subjects rather than as a second language to be learned). The success of the Rock Point Community School in the Navajo Nation, which has had a maintenance (developmental) bilingual program for almost thirty years is a good example of what can be done in schools to build on home and community language preservation efforts (Reyhner, 1990).

In **stage three** the indigenous language is used among employees (but not by supervisors). Historically, it has been very difficult because of bureaucratic red tape required both by the bureau of Indian Affairs and tribes for local people to get small business started on Indian reservations. Making businesses as easy to open in Indian Nations as outside of Indian country would both keep more income in the Nations and would create new environments for native language use.

Fishman also emphasizes the need to use the indigenous language to give adults

useful information about a variety of topics. For example, he discussed a bilingual book, *Social Work and the Welsh Language* in his May Symposium keynote speech. This book is about "using Welsh in job training, job retraining, health counseling, literacy efforts, school transition, helping kids go from elementary to high school, bereavement counseling, building happy peer group ties, and vocational planning" (Fishman, 1996, p. 195). Using material such as this, indigenous language activists can provide valuable service to their community as they work to revive their language.

In **stage two** lower government services and mass media use the language. Literacy efforts that would halt the "special diglossia" where tribal government officials speak the tribal language but keep all records in English would add prestige to tribal languages. Tribal colleges can do a lot both to promote indigenous language reading and writing skills and can also target their educational programs to the actual local industries and local occupational needs of their particular Indian nation. A good example of this targeting can be found at Salish Kootnai College in Montana. If college educated supervisors use the language, other workers will also be encouraged to use it.

In **stage one**, higher levels of government and higher education use the language. The tribal college movement begun in 1968 with the founding of Navajo Community College is one of the most promising events in Indian country. This movement has grown till in 1996 the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) listed 30 college, institute, and university members. Recently, Sinte Gleska University, Oglala Lakota College, Navajo Community College and Haskell Indian Nations University have started four-year teacher-education programs. Except for Haskell, an intertribal college, tribal language and culture requirements are integral to these teacher education programs.

In contrast to the old assimilationist approaches to Indian education, tribal colleges are formulating a multicultural/ecological educational approach. Lionel Bordeaux, a long time tribal college president and one of the leaders of the tribal college movement noted that "cultural preservation is really the foundation of the tribal colleges" (1991, p. 12). Courses

in tribal languages are a mainstay of tribal college curriculums.

In addition to the efforts of tribal colleges, non-tribal colleges and universities near reservations have been increasing their offerings of tribal languages and sometimes offer bilingual teacher training programs. For example, Northern Arizona University (NAU) for Fall 1996 offered four sections of first year Navajo and one section each of second year Navajo, intermediate conversation, Navajo for Native speakers, Introduction to Translation and Interpretation I, and Navajo Culture and Civilization. NAU also offers a Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Bilingual/Multicultural Education that can lead to an bilingual endorsement on an Arizona basic teaching certificate from the State Board of Education.

The Navajo Teacher Education (NTE) Program, which is a partnership with the Navajo Division of Education and is funded by the Ford Foundation, has been very successful taking courses out to the Navajo Nation. The NTE program requires students to take five Navajo language classes and faculty are trained in the Diné (Navajo) Education Philosophy (Cantoni, 1996).

Conclusion

Fishman notes how the emphasis on individual rights in modern western democracies detracts from the recognition of minority group rights. He maintains that,

> The denial of cultural rights to minorities is as disruptive of the moral fabric of mainstream society as is the denial of civil rights. Civil rights, however, are focused on the individual, while cultural rights must focus on ethnocultural groups. Such groups have no recognized legal standing in many Western democracies where both establishment capitalist thought and anti-establishment Marxist thought prophesies the eclipse of culturally distinct formations and the arrival of a uniformized, all-inclusive 'modern proletarian' culture. (1991, p. 70)

Fishman defends the need to recognize "cultural democracy" as a part of general democracy and to see efforts to preserve and restore minority languages as societal reform efforts that

can lead to the appreciation of the beauty and distinctiveness of other cultures as well. He emphasizes that efforts to restore minority languages should be voluntary and "facilitating and enabling" rather than "compulsory and punitive" and that bilingualism should be viewed as life enriching and a bridge to other cultures. In this he echoes smaller studies such as Colin Baker's (1988) review of compulsory and voluntary efforts to revive Celtic languages in the British Isles in his book *Key Issues in Bilingualism and Bilingual Education.*

Important factors Fishman finds in successful efforts to maintain minority languages include the need for sacrifice, self-help, self-regulation, and the establishment of boundaries. He logically locates the key to minority language preservation in the intergenerational transmission of the language in the home by families, not in government policies and laws. He writes "The road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity" (1991, p. 91). He cautions against putting too much effort and reliance on native language media, schools, and governmental efforts. An indigenous language radio station or policy statements such as those found in the Native American Language Act of 1990 can make for a friendlier environment for minority languages, but they are no substitute for grass roots efforts focused on use of indigenous language in homes and at community social occasions.

Outside of homes, minority language use in early childhood centers, such as the Maori and Hawaiian language nests described in the symposium proceedings, and in pre- and post-natal programs for young mothers is important. In the community, minority language use can also be in cooperative markets, employment centers, recreational centers, legal aid services, credit unions, and so forth. Fishman also points out the need for teachers who teach "academic" subject matter in the home language and who are tolerant and accepting of different dialects. Fishman asserts "it doesn't pay to force a written standard, much less a spoken one, on an adamantly unwilling or seriously ailing speech community" (1991, p. 345). Lastly, social boundaries must be developed that give

minority languages an exclusive role in traditional family and community social activities.

The point Fishman comes back to time and again in his writings is the same one brought up by Lilly Wong Fillmore in her article "When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First" in the September 1991 issue of *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. That issue is the social costs of minority "language-in-culture" loss. These social costs include alcoholism, drug abuse, dysfunctional families, child abuse, and the like, and they are documented extensively in the literature on indigenous peoples. For example, Lakota American Indian Movement leader and movie actor Russell Means (1995) in his autobiography *Where White Men Fear to Tread* chronicles indigenous cultural disintegration and the resulting bar hopping, drinking parties, and drug use that have led to car accidents, alcoholism, and premature deaths of many Indian peoples. He also describes attempts to revive traditional cultural values. The disintegration of "American culture," especially among youth, is decried by Republicans in the ongoing "family values" debates, but social conservatives usually fail to link this crisis with their English-only political agenda and the social costs of assimilation.

Notes

[1]Jon Reyhner was the facilitator or the "Needs and Rationale" group at the November 1994 symposium. He took over the work on Dr. Cantoni's monograph when she went to Italy on sabbatical in December 1995. The full 256 page *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* monograph can be obtained for the price of postage and handling ($2.00 within the U.S., about $10.00 U.S. overseas: send checks or money orders in U.S. funds made out to Northern Arizona University, no purchase orders please) by contacting Jon Reyhner, Bilingual/Multicultural Education Coordinator, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ 86011-5774. Telephone 520 523 0580, FAX 520 523 1929, e-mail <Jon.Reyhner@nau.edu>.

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or families first. *NABE News, 14*(7), 13-14 & 19. (Reprinted from *Education Week*)

Table 1: Needs and Rationale Group Abstract

1.) The legal right to maintain indigenous languages has been accepted for the most part in this country, but the "effective" right is not in the hands of American Indian tribes. They do not have the tools to do the job in spite of recent reversals in government policy in the direction of self-determination.

2.) Accepting Joshua Fishman's emphasis on the necessity for the intergenerational transmission of mother tongues, the Group expressed its belief that a well-planned investment in Indian languages, and indigenous languages generally, would be extremely effective "in terms of addressing pressing national and international problems."

3.) The Group emphasized:
- a) the importance of language as irreplaceable cultural knowledge.
- b) the importance of bilingualism and an "English Plus" philosophy.
- c) the Native American Languages Act's impact on government policy changes.
- d) the importance of family values in language survival.
- e) the work of the Indian Nations at Risk Task Force and the White House Conference of 1992.

4.) The Group recommended several courses of action in developing the "effective right" of Native peoples to maintain their languages:
- a) fostering of new, innovative, community-based approaches.
- b) directing more research efforts toward analyzing community-based successes.
- c) fostering communication and partnerships between communities and organizations trying new approaches to maintaining languages.
- d) promoting heightened consciousness of the catastrophic effects of language loss both among members of language minority populations and among members of the mainstream population.

5.) Because of the federal and state governments' long-term roles in creating the current endangered status of American Indian and Alaskan Native languages, it is appropriate for them to provide assistance in helping American Indians and Alaskan Natives to stabilize and renew their languages.

Table 2: Native American Language Policy Group Abstract

Recommendations:

1. Native American children must be exposed to a stimulating language, cultural, and learning environment.
2. Native children must be provided with equal schooling opportunities early in the educational process, in order to learn their Native languages as well as learning English and other languages.
3. Proficiency in two or more languages must be promoted for all Native American students.
4. Students must have an early access to teachers who are proficient Native language speakers.
5. Native American tribes, parents, schools, and universities must form partnerships for Native language development.
6. Opportunities for the economic development of individuals and tribes in collaboration with businesses and scientific, artistic, commercial, and industrial enterprises must be encouraged, initiated, expanded, and supported.
7. Procedures for the identification of students with special needs, including the gifted and talented, must reflect Native American tribal linguistic, social, and cultural values and practices.
8. For the use and survival of indigenous languages and cultures, it is essential to encourage access to modern telecommunications technology.

Strategies:

1. Encourage local initiatives to carry out policies in support of indigenous languages and cultures.
2. Build national and regional Native consortiums.
3. Propose legislative recommendations to appropriate House and Senate legislators and committees.
4. Submit recommendations to Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), U.S. Department of Education, and other agencies that support Indian education.
5. Encourage partnerships between organizations interested in supporting Native education, language and culture (e.g., National Advisory Council for Indian Education, National Indian Education Association, and so forth).
6. Capitalize on America 2000 and Improving America's Schools Act requirements to develop local education plans with tribal/state agencies that coordinate federal programs serving schools and tribes.
7. Encourage the reorganization of colleges of education involved in teacher preparation and recruitment.
8. Support successful language renewal and development projects.
9. Require research funding to include the development and promotion of assessment instruments and procedures consistent with tribal and cultural values.

Table 3: Family and Community Group Abstract

Issues:

1. All Native American languages are severely threatened.
2. The consciousness levels of Native American families about the threat of language loss tend to be low.
3. Native language is inseparable from cultural identity and spirituality.
4. The impact of non-Native cultural elements on Native American youths interferes with native language acquisition.
5. Language stabilization efforts must proceed in culturally appropriate ways.
6. New effective strategies for intergenerational language transmission can be implemented at various levels, from individual to tribal.
7. Hypercritical native speakers tend to discourage the efforts of less fluent learners.

Strategies:

Individual level: Native speakers must help latent speakers and non-speakers learn the native language by utilizing existing language learning material, taped stories, and by creating new materials.

Family level: Organize family reunions and family-based summertime and weekend language immersion activities; encourage families to limit the intrusion of English-language media; and establish parental support groups for native language.

Community level: Encourage senior citizens centers to have seniors use their native language with young children, for example in "language nests" at local preschools and Head Start centers; promote community seminars in the native language, community meetings and conferences about native language, language institutes for families and communities, and programs for parents of children in bilingual programs; and establish "banks" of language learning materials.

Tribal Nations level: Encourage elected officials to use and promote the native language; develop networks of Native American language supporters across tribal boundaries.

Promotion of attitudes: Use every means to promote native language and the virtues of bilingualism: radio announcements, air speakers' testimonials, posters, bumper stickers, T-shirts. Document successful efforts.

Table 4: Education Group Abstract

1. Financial responsibility for programs for the revitalization of native languages, which start with the help of federal grant money, should eventually be assumed by local agencies in order to provide program permanence and promote self-determination and community initiative.

2. Methods of teaching the native language in schools in grades K-12 need to be interactive and grounded in children's experiences at school, at home, and in the community. Develop immersion programs and use authentic narratives.

3. Recruitment of competent school teachers and on-going training of all school personnel in the native language, history, and culture are essential. All staff should be required to meet the minimum competency standard in the native language over an agreed period of time.

4. The interface between institutions of higher education and native communities needs to be defined more sharply. Changes need to be made in the certification and preparation of teachers by shifting to competency-based approaches and by bringing tribal leaders into the decision-making process.

5. Local tribal groups should be encouraged to seek "seed" money to begin serious planning for collaborative efforts: a) to enlist the support of tribal leaders in native communities; b) to begin serious national policy reform in schools in Native American communities; c) to implement programs for the revitalization of the native languages where there is local desire and willingness.

Table 5: Eight Points of Language Learning
(From Hinton, 1994, pp. 243-244, used by permission)

Teachers	Apprentices
1. Be an active teacher. Find things to talk about. Create situations or find something in any situation to talk about. Tell stories. Use the language to tell the apprentice to do things. Encourage conversation.	**1. Be an active learner.** Ask about things. Create situations, bring things to ask your teacher to tell you about; find things in the environment to ask about; ask him/her to tell you stories.
2. Don't use English, not even to translate.	**2. Don't use English**, not even when you can't say it in the language. Find other ways to communicate what you want to say.
3. Use gestures, context, objects, actions to help the apprentice understand what you are saying	**3. Use gestures, context, objects, actions** to help in your communication when you don't know the words.
4. Rephrase for successful communication. Rephrase things the apprentice doesn't understand, using simper ways to say them.	**4. Practice.** Use new words and new sentences and grammar as much as possible, to yourself, to your teacher, to other people.
5. Rephrase for added learning. Rephrase things the apprentice says to show him correct forms or extend his knowledge to more complex forms. Encourage communication in the language, even with errors.	**5. Don't be afraid of mistakes.** If you don't know how to say something right, say it wrong. Use whatever words you know; use gestures, etc. for the rest.
6. Be willing to play with language. Fantasize together; make up plays, poems, and word games together.color they are. Make up stories.	**6. Be willing to play with language** like children do. Name things you see, count them, talk about what
7. Understanding precedes speaking. Use various ways to increase and test understanding. Give the apprentice commands to follow. Ask him/her questions. It is not necessary to focus on speaking each new word right away; that will come naturally.	**7. Understanding precedes speaking.** You may recognize and understand many things you cannot say. Focus on understanding: that is the most important step toward language learning. After you understand an utterance fully, learning to speak it will not take long.
8. Be patient. An apprentice won't learn something in one lesson. Repeat words and phrases often, in as many different situations and conversations as possibie.	**8. Be patient with yourself.** It takes a long time to learn a language well. You are doing a heroic task; forgive mistakes.

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